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ABSTRACT

This bulletin presents two articles which challenge the current special education system, one in terms of the conceptualization of disability and the second in terms of differential and discriminatory treatment of poor and minority youth. The first article titled "New Trends in Disability Studies: Implications for Educational Policy" (Harlan Hahn) rejects the individual deficit model that undergirds current special education and argues for a sociopolitical definition which sees disability as a consequence of the interaction between individuals and the environment. Inclusion is seen as a fundamental component in the process of altering the educational environment. The second article, by Dorothy Kerzner Lipsky and Alan Gartner, and titled "Special Education: Double Jeopardy for Minority and Poor Youth," surveys national, state, and local data concerning minority youth in special education programs. It documents the continuation of a disproportionate percentage of minority youth in special education and their assignment to those categories that are in the most restrictive placements (mental retardation and emotional disturbance), a policy which results in a form of double segregation. It also addresses the broader societal debate concerning the nature and role of intelligence and concludes that separate special education services sort out minority children, limit their educational achievement, and then provide justification for their failure. (Contains 10 references.) (DB)

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Editor's Introduction

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Special Education: Double Jeopardy for Minority and Poor Youth, *p.6*.

This Bulletin includes two articles, "New Trends in Disability Studies: Implications for Educational Policy" (Hahn) and "Special Education: Double Jeopardy for Minority and Poor Youth" (Lipsky and Gartner). Each presents an analysis that challenges the current special education system — the former in terms of the conceptualization of disability and the latter in terms of differential and discriminatory treatment of poor and minority youth.

Adults with disabilities are increasingly speaking out about the education of students with disabilities. They are doing so organizationally in the disability rights movement, politically in their presence in leadership positions, and intellectually in the emerging field of disability studies. Programmatically, in education, adults with disabilities are providing expertise to school districts and to parents of children with disabilities. Harlan Hahn, one the leading theorists in disability studies, challenges both the traditional paradigm of disability and its consequence for the education of students with disabilities. Rejecting the individual deficit model that undergirds current special education, he argues for a sociopolitical definition, seeing disability as a consequence of the interaction between individuals and the environment. Echoing the language of Brown, he writes, "Since separation on the basis of disability is apt to leave an enduring imprint on the hearts and minds of disabled young people, inclusion is a fundamental component in the process of altering the educational environment."

The second article, "Double Jeopardy for Minority and Poor Youth" surveys national, state, and local data concerning minority youth in special education programs. The report not only documents the continuation of a disproportionate percentage of minority youth in special education but their assignment to just those categories that are in the most restrictive placement, e.g., mental retardation and emotional disturbance; in effect, a form of double segregation. The article addresses the broader societal debate concerning the nature and role of intelligence (cf. *The Bell Curve*) and concludes that separate special education serves to sort out minority children, to limit their educational achievement, and then to provide justification for their failure.

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New Trends in Disability Studies: Implications for Educational Policy

by Harlan Hahn, University of Southern California

In the final quarter of the twentieth century, the adoption of P.L. 94-142, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act has signaled profound changes in disability policy. These developments have been promoted both by the growth of the disability rights movement and by an emerging transition from a "functional limitations" paradigm, which concentrates on the effects of impairments, to a "minority group" model that opens up numerous opportunities for research on social and political discrimination. Although much of the new legislation was based on the "minority group" perspective, many analyses of educational and other issues have continued to reflect vestiges of the earlier emphasis on "functional limitations."

Perhaps the clearest example of the contrast between these two paradigms is revealed by changing definitions of disability. Whereas the prior model was founded on medical concepts (which stress physiological limits) or economic orientations (which focus on vocational restrictions), the foundation of the "minority group" approach is a sociopolitical definition. According to this view, disability is a consequence of the interaction between individuals and the environment. Thus, disability is no longer a personal defect or deficiency; instead, it is primarily the product of a disabling environment. As a result, education in a segregated or discriminatory environment is almost certain to have an adverse impact on disabled students, regardless of the rationale that attempts to justify it. In addition, researchers are beginning to develop a multidisciplinary field of "disability studies," based on the experience of disabled persons, that might contribute a significant dimension to teaching about

diversity. The implications of these trends not only seem to indicate a clear analogy between disability and race, ethnicity, or gender, but they also highlight epistemological issues that may affect a wide range of educational policies.

Nonetheless, the gradual decline of the functional limitations paradigm has also been marked by a form of resistance that has tended to marginalize disabled children and adults. In education, for example, desegregation has been translated euphemistically as "mainstreaming," standards of equality have been redefined as the "least restrictive environment," and remedies have emphasized legal protection and professional intervention instead of empowerment. (As a term that implies integration, "inclusion" can be interpreted from a disability rights perspective as virtually equivalent to desegregation.) While some concepts may reflect basic misunderstandings about the nature and meaning of disability, many also appear to indicate a tendency by educators to regard the rights of disabled persons as "special" rather than as fundamental guarantees available to every citizen.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the educational implications of the "minority group" model for the study of disability. The first section examines the effects of medical, economic, and sociopolitical definitions on educational policies and practices. The second portion investigates the impact of the educational environment on disabled students. Proposals for changing schools, especially to promote equality and to end discrimination on the basis of disability, are presented in conclusion. The presentation, therefore, is designed to provide both an analysis of emerging issues in disability research and a vision of the future.

The Educational Implications of Disability Definitions

The Medical Approach

Perhaps the most popular understanding of disability is based on a medical definition. This orientation probably emerged during the Enlightenment from the philosophy of liberal individualism that replaced the religious interpretation of disability as either a curse of the devil or a legitimate object of charity. From a medical vantage point, the problems of a disability arise almost exclusively from pathological impairments, or a physical or mental inability to perform so-called "normal" tasks. But hardly anyone is capable of performing all of life's activities at a "normal" level, a fact that gives credence to the familiar adage that "everyone is handicapped" at least in some respect. Moreover, medical standards or measurements of "normal" functioning — or of corporeal perfection — are never specified precisely. And, by the time most disabled students enter the schoolroom, they usually have completed an extensive program of treatment or rehabilitation designed to restore their functional capacities to the maximum extent possible.

From the perspective of many disabled individuals, their principal difficulties do not result from physical or mental limitations or from functional concerns. On the contrary, their major problems reflect the discrimination that emerges from efforts to cope with an environment generally designed by and for the nondisabled. Consequently, a growing number of disabled people perceive disability as another manifestation of human differences rather than as a lack of functional capabilities. In their view, the principles of the *Brown* decision can be applied to disabled students without significant modification. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. And, if the separation of African-American and white students — as well as women and men — can have a debilitating impact on the academic attainments of the former groups, the segregation of disabled and nondisabled young people seems virtually certain to have similar effects.

From this viewpoint, the failure of medical research to provide a satisfactory explanation or remedy for the major difficulties confronting disabled children and adults probably can be attributed to three factors. The first is the inapplicability of the "medical model," derived from experience with acute illnesses, to chronic or permanent bodily conditions. Especially irrelevant is Parson's structural-functional definition of the "sick role" as an exemption from ordinary social responsibilities provided that "patients" submit to professional supervision and devote all of their energies to the eventual goal of full recovery. But disabled people are neither "sick" nor can they be relegated to little more than an unending role as "patients." And, of course, in most cases, the complete restoration of all physical and mental capabilities is not a feasible objective.

Second are the constraints of a clinical orientation that usually confine the search for causes and solutions to problems concerning disability to an area demarcated by the outer boundaries of the human body. Educators and other professionals interested in disability often encounter an apparently inescapable dilemma: They can force the individual to adapt to the present environment or they can adapt the environment to the person. But, since complete recovery seems precluded by the concept of permanent or chronic conditions, attention must eventually shift to the latter endeavor.

Finally, disabled children and adults are plagued by the issue of biological inferiority. Whereas other groups have generally succeeded in disproving this explanation of social inequality based on gender, race or ethnicity, and sexual orientation, this interpretation is still commonly associated with the disadvantaged status of people with disabilities. The logical implications of the argument, however, would seem to require policy-makers to establish a specific level of physical and mental competence, or mastery of the existing environment, as a prerequisite for exercising the rights of citizenship including the right to "a free, appropriate education." While some American eugenicists obviously would have favored such criteria earlier in the twentieth century, this possibility has been seemingly foreclosed by the *PARC* and *Mills* decisions. Mastery of an unaccommodating and inhospitable environment is not an acceptable requirement for participation in a democratic society.

The Economic Orientation

The perspective most widely adopted in public policy reflects an economic understanding that tends to equate disability with unemployability. Although disabled children and adults may have played a productive role in many households prior to the separation of home and work, this definition seemed to derive in part from their historical status as beggars and recipients of private charity. The concept of the "sick role" also supported the creation of social-wel-

fare policies granting benefits to disabled persons deemed incapable of securing employment; and, somewhat inconsistently, vocational rehabilitation programs provide some of them with training, often for entry-level jobs that offer few opportunities for promotion.

Both the meager benefits and the confusion fostered by economic approaches to disability have seemed to reinforce Marxist claims that disabled workers are part of an "industrial reserve army" relieving capitalist economies from excessive demands for employment. In fact, during World War II, disabled people joined housewives, racial or ethnic minorities, and aging workers as replacements in the labor force for nondisabled males serving in the armed forces; and they were excluded from employment again by discriminatory medical exams when veterans returned from military combat. Other investigations have indicated that the increased payment of disability benefits may reflect the failure of many workers to adjust to the transition from an industrial to a service economy. And physical appearance has seemed to become an increasingly significant criteria for employment. One analysis even has indicated that policy-makers may be relatively satisfied as long as excess political rewards and advantages "do not flow to groups that are perceived as blatantly dissimilar." As a result, economic and political elites expect schools to furnish them with a constant supply of relatively young, attractive, nondisabled workers (especially white males) with middle-class values; and a disproportionate share of government funding is devoted to educating individuals who possess these traits. By contrast, of course, fewer resources are allocated to schools and programs that attempt to teach comparatively unattractive, working-class, aging, or disabled students as well as women and racial or ethnic minorities.

These patterns are not likely to persist indefinitely, however. With the adoption of measures prohibiting employment discrimination and requiring employers to provide "reasonable accommodations" for disabled workers under the American with Disabilities Act, as an example, teachers face the challenge of preparing students with disabilities for skilled managerial and professional rather than entry-level positions. Employers are also likely to confront growing litigation to narrow the definition of "bona fide occupational qualifications," which often contain unspoken assumptions that have a discriminatory impact on job applicants with disabilities. And mounting controversies about employer preferences regarding physical appearance may emerge as cultural issues become increasingly salient in a hegemonic post-industrial economy.

The Sociopolitical Definition

The foundation of the "minority group" model is a sociopolitical definition of disability that focuses on the external environment instead of personal traits. This shift enabled researchers to recognize that disabled people have many of the same characteristics as other minorities. Not only are they plagued by extraordinarily high rates of poverty, welfare dependency, and unemployment; but they also confront obstacles in housing, transportation, social communication, and public accommodations that are equivalent to traditional barriers separating whites and African-Americans. And, of course, many disabled women and men have been educated in a school system that is fundamentally segregated.

From a sociopolitical perspective, the basic source of this inequality can be traced to public attitudes. Although relatively little attention has been devoted to the comparison, for example, Richardson's research on pictures of children revealed that preferences for a nondisabled playmate seemed to develop at an earlier age and to be more prevalent than the choice of white dolls in Clark's famous experiment. Perhaps the principal missing element in the former studies, which appeared to disclose a deep-seated rejection of youngsters with various types of disabilities by nondisabled adults as well as children, is any discussion of self-hatred. But most disabled persons have probably been too heavily burdened by stigmatizing attitudes for researchers to give serious consideration to this issue. In fact, psychological adjustment has been the major palliative traditionally proposed by social scientists for dealing with both functional difficulties and the stigma of a visible or labeled disability.

Perhaps the principal reason for the relative neglect of attitudes in disability research can be ascribed to a pervasive sense of paternalism that may have been bequeathed by the legacy of benevolent charity. But disabled children and adults are seldom unaware of the negative feelings faintly concealed beneath the surface of social interactions that frequently are exposed by a tendency to shun or avoid them. The failure of nondisabled professionals to focus on this phenomenon may represent a forum of denial created in part by guilt. And, of course, institutional practices that reinforce this pattern of avoidance by segregating disabled and nondisabled students in the schools only tend to exacerbate the effects of stigma.

Although psychoanalytic concepts concerning the symbolism of bodily injury can also be adduced to interpret unconscious aversion to people with disabilities, probably the most readily available explanation for unfavorable attitudes toward disability can be traced to "stranger anxiety," or the tendency of infants to display discomfort in the presence of anyone who appears alien or unfamiliar. Although this process might contribute to a definition of the self by permitting children to distinguish between what is "like me" and "not like me," it also seems to underscore the point that disparaging views of disability often are based on reactions to visible human differences rather than on perceptions of functional loss. In addition, such responses may be subtly reinforced by media images of an idealized physical appearance or attractiveness that viewers are encouraged to emulate.

In fact, it has been proposed that attitudinal discrimination against disabled persons can be traced either to "existential" anxiety, the fear of progressive debility and death, or to "aesthetic" anxiety, a repugnant feeling about physical features that are culturally defined as undesirable or unappealing. While "existential anxiety" has been related to the "functional limitations" paradigm, "aesthetic anxiety" has been linked with the "minority group" model. The association between aesthetic displeasure and bodily deviance or strangeness seems to underscore the importance of desegregation or inclusion in the education of nondisabled as well as disabled students. All children must learn that human beings come in different "packaging" and that everybody is

entitled to dignity and respect, regardless of physical appearance. Students with visible disabilities can play a crucial role in teaching their nondisabled counterparts this valuable lesson. Furthermore, the dangers of paternalism indicate that efforts to protect disabled children from the unfavorable responses of their classmates are inadvisable. The insults of the playground can be cruel; but learning to cope with offensive comments there probably represents indispensable preparation in acquiring the social skills they may need in later years.

Changing Educational Environments

The implications of the sociopolitical definition clearly indicate a need to alter the educational environment rather than to pursue continuous efforts to modify the functional characteristics of disabled students. Since separation on the basis of disability is apt to leave an enduring imprint on the hearts and minds of disabled young people, desegregation or inclusion is a fundamental component of this process. In addition, other changes might be appropriately guided by the principle of Equal Environmental Adaptations, which is designed to provide commensurate advantages for disabled and nondisabled persons. (This concept has also been proposed as a standard for interpreting the "reasonable accommodations" clause of the American with Disabilities Act.) Perhaps the clearest example of this criterion is symbolized by the presence of chairs in most classrooms. Chairs are an accommodation to the needs of nondisabled students; but they are of no value to many disabled persons, such as myself, who are considerate enough to bring our own chairs. Without chairs, nondisabled students would undoubtedly become fatigued from standing or sitting on the floor, they would probably be discouraged from attending classes, and their performance on tests and other evaluations might be adversely affected. Since the sociopolitical perspective treats disability as a generic concept rather than as a product of specific diagnostic or other classifications, commensurate benefits for disabled students must extend beyond providing accessible rest rooms, widening the aisles between library stacks, and installing ramps or elevators for wheelchair users; they should also include a broad range of accommodations to various types of disabilities. Chairs are a major item in many school budgets, but Equal Environmental Adaptations cannot be measured by economic considerations alone. Perhaps most importantly, they signify only one facet of the "taken-for-granted" environment that confers many significant advantages on the nondisabled and corresponding disadvantages on disabled students. Increased acceptance of the sociopolitical definition of disability is likely to yield numerous other examples of similar disparities in educational settings.

Persons with sensory disabilities have been especially disadvantaged by the intrinsic inequality of educational environments. Many books are unavailable in Braille or on tape for students with vision impairments, and schools may not provide readers. Perhaps the most common form of discrimination in classroom instruction, however, results from an exclusive reliance on verbal communication. As a result, the education of students with hearing impairments usually has occurred in residential institutions that offered a basis for organized cohesion; and deaf persons have made more progress in forming a distinctive culture than any other group of people with disabilities. At least part of the solution in each case seems to require increased experimentation with written and audio-visual as well as multiple modes of communication.

The most significant — and the most expensive — component of the educational environment, however, consists of personnel. While there is a danger that teachers may be unduly influenced by first impressions of the appearance of students that are perpetuated through subsequent grades, no definitive method or formula for the effective teaching of students with disabilities has been discovered. In fact, these issues raise even broader questions about what the schools should teach, at what pace, and for what purpose. Obviously the debate about these matters cannot be resolved here. But the mere fact that the controversies persist can be interpreted as indicating that the line between mental and physical disabilities may not be as clear as it is commonly drawn. They often overlap; but, especially in the absence of a precise statement of priorities such as the relative importance of academic materials and social skills, the conclusion that some disabled children are incapable of attaining significant educational objectives would seem to be unwarranted or at least premature. Much of the information that students are presently expected to learn in the schools also reflects the demands of an environment designed for the nondisabled that can, of course, be modified or altered. By contrast, the eventual goal of the disability rights movement is an environment adapted to the needs of everyone including children who bear the label of severe mental retardation; men and women at the peak of their physical and intellectual prowess; and aging persons with chronic, progressive, or terminal health problems.

Another critical key to the puzzle is indicated by a major conclusion of one of the first examinations of disability to adopt the "minority group" model. This study of disabled children, which was appropriately titled "The Unexpected Minority," discovered that youngsters with major physical and other disabilities frequently acquire skills at a rate that defies the expectations of developmental psychologists. While some of them have difficulty with problems that nondisabled children ordinarily resolve at a relatively early age, they often display talents that their nondisabled peers do not gain until a later stage of development. Perhaps part of the reason for these variations can be ascribed to discrepancies between the experience of disabled and nondisabled children. The finding also indicates the pitfalls of attempting to establish "normal" standards of personal abilities, but it presents a serious challenge to school curricula that are usually based on modal patterns. Further research on the development of disabled children could yield significant improvements in planning educational programs.

Perhaps the most crucial challenge facing teachers, however, emerges from the task of relating to the everyday experience of disabled individuals. Most educational theories have been formulated with little, if any, regard for disability; and most teachers are not disabled themselves. As a result, disabled students and their teachers may stare at each other daily in the classroom across a vast chasm produced by divergent understandings and lifestyles. Given the prevalence of paternalistic attitudes, teachers may sympathize

rather than empathize with their disabled pupils; or they may have trouble in coping with barely conscious feelings of avoidance and aversion. Perhaps an increased appreciation of the strengths instead of the presumed deficiencies of disabled students might improve the attitudes of teachers whose negative perceptions of inclusion often seem to be based on the belief that they will be overburdened by an excessive need for attention and assistance.

The issues created by the gap between disabled students and nondisabled teachers also involve complex epistemological questions implicit in the controversy within higher education over plans to promote the study of cultural diversity. Part of this debate, of course, revolves about the contention that conventional canons of academic knowledge tend to silence the voice of the Other, or groups that have traditionally been marginalized or excluded from the mainstream of society. Among researchers interested in disability studies, questions about whether or not a "disability culture" can be identified are still controversial. Perhaps a major part of the difficulty is that, unlike most other minorities, disabled people do not have a sense of generational continuity that would otherwise permit the legacy of their accumulated experiences to be transmitted over time. Nor have universities generally regarded the subject as a legitimate area of scholarly inquiry. As a result, disabled people have no history, no prominent role models, and little awareness of the advantages as well as the disadvantages of their distinctive perspective. Thus, parents, teachers, and other professionals have been deprived of a critical source of information and insights. Yet, inspired in part by the disability rights movement, growing numbers of disabled people have begun to share common experiences and viewpoints. Increased investigations of these experiences could add a valuable dimension to the curriculum at all levels.

Does this mean that I.Q. and other tests might be culturally biased on the basis of disability? Although hardly any attempts have been made to conduct item-by-item analyses, the answer seems to be a tentative yes. Most instruments are designed to measure existing competence rather than individual potential. Since almost all women and men with disabilities have been molded and taught in a disabling environment, these assessments can scarcely be expected to provide an accurate indication of their actual capabilities. In order to remove these disadvantages, educational programs for disabled students must be evaluated by an appropriate standard of equality.

Toward Equality in Education

From the opening line of the Declaration of Independence to the historic words of the Supreme Court in the *Brown* decision, equality has been a central value in the American political tradition. Yet, there are significant variations in standards that have been proposed to measure this concept. From a sociopolitical perspective, some of these definitions can be appropriately applied to the circumstances of disabled students, while other meanings seem either undesirable or not politically feasible.

Perhaps one of the most traditional, and least stringent, conventional interpretations of this standard is the concept of equality before the law. Although this definition is supposed to yield fairness or impartiality, the mantle of objectivity that surrounds judicial rulings — and educational tests — based on this concept of equality often seems to conceal the interests both of the persons implementing this principle and of the groups to which it is applied. As a result, for example, many feminists, who became frustrated by patriarchical values that permeate the law, have abandoned the quest for this form of equality; and they have urged judges and lawmakers to make decisions based on an explicit consciousness of the disadvantaged status of women. The same point is applicable to people with disabilities. Since their principal problems stem from discriminatory attitudes at a conscious or an unconscious level, many of them do not expect nondisabled policymakers to approach educational issues in a neutral or impartial manner. Particularly troubling to some is the negative phrasing of the concept of "the least restrictive environment," which was derived from court cases about incarceration rather than about discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or gender.

Another relatively conservative view that has been widely accepted in American law is the notion of equality of opportunity. According to this perspective, the basic conditions of equality in "the race of life" are satisfied as long as all of the contestants are lined up evenly at the starting line. In an analogy which is especially compatible with the American economic system, the outcome of this competition is supposedly determined by the principles of meritocracy that have seemingly been reflected in educational policy by a questionable belief in innate intelligence. But this metaphor ignores the context or the environment in which the competition is conducted. If the lane of the race track assigned to disabled contestants is filled with obstacles, for example, the competition can hardly be considered fair. And, for most disabled children and adults, the obstacles presented by architectural inaccessibility, communication barriers, the effects of stigmatizing attitudes, and the demands of a discriminatory environment often appear to be almost insurmountable. The solution, of course, is to "clear the track" by changing the environment instead of the person.

A related concept, which has often been implicitly invoked in discussions of discrimination based on race or ethnicity, is represented by what might be called a converging equality. From this perspective, many political leaders believe that they have fulfilled their responsibilities so long as the social and economic conditions of minorities indicate improvements or gradual progress toward a deferred dream of genuine parity. In education, this interpretation of equality appears to be represented by compensatory or remedial programs designed to reduce the gap between disadvantaged groups and segments of the population that are privileged by the circumstances of their birth or by their capacity to adapt or assimilate to the cultural demands of society. But this viewpoint leaves inequalities created by the institutional arrangement of power between dominant and subordinate groups fundamentally undisturbed. The discrepancy between this view and a stricter standard of equality signifies a major conflict between white liberals and many African-Americans. And the hope for convergence has seldom been realized. Empirical indicators reveal that, while the status of racial or ethnic minorities and women has improved somewhat in recent decades, these gains have commonly been overshadowed by even greater gains in the position of white or Anglo

males. The traditional faith in education as a route to upward mobility is revealed by the fact that the major possible exception to this generalization may be reflected by patterns of college enrollment among these minorities and women. Despite the provisions of P.L. 94-142, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act, available evidence indicates that similar trends among disabled students appear to be slight or nonexistent.

Perhaps the most appropriate standard for assessing an educational milieu fitted to the interests and needs of students with disabilities is equality of results. Assuming the possibility of defining the skills and knowledge that any person might need to survive or to flourish in a suitable environment beyond the classroom, education would continue until each student meets the required criteria. Teaching would be conducted at least in part through individual tutorials adapted to the pace at which youngsters with different developmental patterns learn. This procedure would eliminate the need for tests that attempt to assess aptitude or potential; instead, attention would focus on the creation of standardized evaluations of demonstrated performance and on the identification of necessary or essential requirements for participation in a democratic society. This approach is based on the radical assumption that all human beings have equal dignity and worth. In many respects, an even more desirable proposal is embodied in the idea of equal shares, which could be pursued by mobilizing educational and other resources to combat poverty and to ensure that everybody can secure an acceptable measure of personal or material success. Implementation of the concepts of equal resources or shares, however, would probably necessitate a substantial redistribution of financial revenue from those occupations that obtain fiscal benefits primarily from the private sector of the economy to other groups, such as children, who receive such rewards in large measure from public programs. As a result, both concepts are likely to arouse intense political resistance among adults who believe that they are entitled to enjoy their status as the beneficiaries of social and economic privileges without paying for them.

As America approaches the close of the twentieth century, therefore, the most immediate issue on the agenda of educational programs for students with disabilities appears to revolve about acceptance of the principle of Equality of Environment Adaptations. The objective of this concept, which reflects only a slight extension of the conservative criterion of equal opportunities, is simply to establish parity, or commensurate benefits, for disabled and nondisabled schoolchildren. Although the costs of such a policy cannot be calculated yet because little systematic attention has been devoted to "taken-for-granted" advantages conferred on the nondisabled, further research is likely to uncover many additional examples of this form of inequality. In the long run, equal results may be even less expensive than equal opportunities. At a minimum, however, disabled students should not be forced to bear the stigma of a segregated school system; and mastery of the existing environment should not be considered a necessary prerequisite to exercising the rights of citizenship.

Like many other disadvantaged groups such as women, African-Americans, Latinos, native Americans, Asian-Americans, gays and lesbians, and aging individuals, people with disabilities are striving to translate previously devalued personal characteristics into a positive sense of political identity. Part of this development has prompted a realization that, in the aftermath of a disabling incident, people generally tend to view their surroundings differently and that a "differenced" perspective can be a source of creativity which may eventually promote empowerment. Many young people with disabilities have displayed capacities to respond successfully to unusually difficult challenges that are similar to the traits educators have increasingly identified as the hallmark of students who are perceived as especially talented or gifted. People with disabilities also may acquire unusual adaptation skills as a result of their continuous efforts to cope with an inhospitable environment. Inspired by such observations and by the impetus of the disability rights movement, therefore, researchers have begun to advocate the reorganization of administrative units in universities to form a multidisciplinary curriculum in disability studies that would offer essential training not only for teachers but also for other professionals who provide services to disabled persons including social work, gerontology, architecture, occupational therapy, nursing, medicine, and rehabilitation counseling. This approach would be based primarily on the compiled experiences of disabled people themselves rather than on theories derived from other disciplines.

Perhaps most importantly, a consciousness that disability simply signifies another human difference instead of functional restrictions might form the basis for a future countercultural movement to promote an increased appreciation of diversity and heterogeneity in everyday life. In a culture that seems to revere youth, heterosexuality, a powerful masculinity, whiteness, physical attractiveness, and body perfectibility, this objective may represent one of the most important missions that society can pursue.

Special Education: Double Jeopardy for Minority and Poor Youth

Dorothy Kerzner Lipsky and Alan Gartner

At the recent TASH convention's Roundtable on Inclusion, a teacher from the Boston school system noted the continuing salience of race in the world of special education. At a time when *The Bell Curve* tops the nonfiction best-seller lists, one both needs to be reminded as well as ever vigilant as to the pernicious consequences of race-based victim blaming.

In reviewing America's history, it is clear that when the populace is anxious about the future, race issues become salient. This was true in the early part of the century as nativists feared the "hordes" of immigrants. Perhaps for the first time in our history, there is a pervasive fear that the upcoming generation's future is less sanguine than their parents. Just as Goddard's perversion of Binet's work provided a "scientific" basis to exclude southern and eastern Europeans immigrants, finding them feebleminded and ignorant, so, today, the separate special education system segregates

minority students, particularly African-American males.

A review of the national special education data shows that blacks are twice as likely as whites to be in special education programs. "In 39 states, according to a *U.S. News [& World Report]* analysis of Department of Education data, black students are overrepresented in special education programs, compared with their percentage of the overall student population" ("Separate and unequal," 1993, p. 48). Based upon comparisons of the total black student population with black students in special education programs, the largest discrepancies were found in Delaware, 29% vs. 41%; South Carolina, 42% vs. 51%; Connecticut, 14% vs. 22%; Louisiana, 46% vs. 53%; North Carolina, 33% vs. 40%; and Nevada, 12% vs. 19%. Similar disparities occur when one examines nationally the percentage of racial groups by disability category:

- Retarded: Black, 26%; white 11%; Hispanic 18%
- Learning-disabled: Black, 43%; white 51%; Hispanic 55%
- Emotionally disturbed: Black, 8%; white 8%; Hispanic 4%
- Speech-impaired: Black, 23%; white, 30%; Hispanic, 23%

("Separate and unequal," 1993, p. 54).

In reviewing data concerning states' labelling practices for black students with retardation, wide discrepancies can be identified. For example, five states label more than a third of their black special education students as retarded: Alabama, 47%; Ohio, 41%; Arkansas, 37%; Indiana, 37%; and Georgia, 36%. In comparison, five states label fewer than a tenth of their black special education students as retarded: Nevada, 9%; Connecticut, 7%; Maryland, 8%; New Jersey, 6%; and Alaska, 3% ("Separate and unequal," 1993, p. 55).

The disparities in national data reflect the reality in local districts. Indeed, the disparities are magnified as minority special education students are overrepresented in more restrictive settings, producing — in effect — double segregation. In the New York City Public Schools, for example, 84 percent of students in separate special education classes were black and Hispanic, while 73 percent of the overall student population was comprised of these two groups. On the other hand, white students, who comprised 20 percent of the school system's population accounted for 37 percent of the special education students placed in general education settings while receiving support services (Richardson, 1993, p. B7).

A review of data from Connecticut reinforces these discrepancies (Nerney & Conroy, 1994). In the 1990-91 school year, they report:

- of all minority females certified as "handicapped," 18% were labelled as with mental retardation. This compares with 2% of white males and 5% of white females; and
- 30% of minority males were labelled as socially or emotionally disturbed. This compares with 20% of white males and 12% of minority females so labelled.

In terms of prevalence rates, black students were twice as likely to be labelled as with social and emotional disturbances as were white, half as likely to be labelled as with speech or language impairments, and three times as likely to be labelled as mentally retarded.

Concerning discrepancies in placements, Nerney and Conroy (1994) report:

- 43% of minority males and 42% of minority females were in "separate classes," while the comparable figure for white students, male and female, was 22%; and
- among those students labelled as "LD," more than a third of the minority students were placed in "separate classes" (36% for males and 34% for females), while the comparable figure for whites, both males and females, was less than half that, 15%.

As with their school performance, demographic factors influenced postschool outcomes.

> Controlling for other differences, African-American youth with disabilities were significantly less likely than white youth to find competitive jobs. When they did work, they earned significantly less than white workers. They were also significantly less likely to be living independently and to be fully participating in the community (i.e., being productively engaged outside the home, residentially independent, and socially involved). (*The transition experiences*, 1993, p. 1-4)

What accounts for these discrepancies in certification, labelling, placement, and outcomes?

As Kirkpatrick (1994) points out, while mental retardation can be caused by poverty conditions, "the greater number of black children in special education cannot be explained solely by socioeconomic factors" (p. 2). The inability of schools to be successful for African-American students, especially males, is significant in special education. Ysseldyke, a leading expert on referral and assessment, states, "Studies show teachers refer kids who bother them, and we've been able to demonstrate that specifically African-American males demonstrate behavior that bothers teachers" (Cited in Richardson, 1994, p. B7).

The consequence of factors in educational practice are documented by Podell and Soodak (1993).

> [W]hen a child with mild learning problems is from a low-SES family, teachers with low personal efficacy are less likely than teachers with high personal efficacy to consider regular education to be an appropriate placement for the child. Personal efficacy did not, however, influence placement judgments about high-SES children. Thus, low-SES students may be at greatest risk for referral because of teacher, rather than student, factors. In other words, teachers' decisions about poor children are susceptible to bias when teachers perceive themselves as ineffectual. That finding may be important in understanding the overrepresentation of low-SES children in special education (p. 251).

The work of Slee (1993) in Australia provides broader compass to these matters.

> The reliance on intelligence testing as the basis for drafting the majority of children placed in special settings occurred at a time when Victoria was undergoing massive industrialization, the workforce was being professionalized, and effects of liberal immigration policies and rapid urbanization were at a peak. Changes to the Victorian social and economic infrastructure were not isolated from the school system, which represented an important arena

where the contest for social mobility was played out. Here the spreading use of standardized testing played its part in the maintenance of the existing social order at a time when the established middle class was under threat from an upwardly mobile workforce (p. 19).

It is not simply that such testing performs a pernicious function, and that its premises implicate racial and ethnic discrimination; it is based upon an erroneous understanding of intelligence, as a fixed and largely heritable characteristic, that could be precisely measured and provide an accurate predictor as to one's future success in school and life.

Robert Sternberg (1994), in his review of *The Bell Curve*, also links the practices of an earlier period with the continuing salience of race. He notes that in 1904, Alfred Binet developed a test that would distinguish children who were genuinely mentally retarded from those who were merely behavioral problems, and in the same year Charles Spearman published his first article arguing for the importance of what he referred to as "g," or general ability. Sternberg points out that while Spearman, a believer in racial differences in intelligence, might have applauded the Herrnstein-Murray book, Binet certainly would not have. For Binet,

> the goal of the test was to *protect* children from callous-labeling. At the time, the distinction between mental retardation and behavioral problems was not clear and the goal...of Binet was to ensure that children whom a teacher found merely disagreeable were not, as a result of their intransigence, relegated to classes for the retarded where the teacher would not have to deal with them anymore. Perhaps little has changed: Ethnic and other groups that do not conform to the desired behavioral patterns of society still seem to be targets for labels of mental inferiority (Emphasis in the original, p. 5).

Critique of *The Bell Curve* comes from other distinguished scholars as well. Harvard's Stephen Jay Gould found that "its logic is quite faulty," resting on a narrow definition of intelligence that blurs the distinction between heritability and immutability, while Edmund Gordon, The Graduate School and University Center, The City University of New York, said it pandered to racism and selfishness among whites ("Race study," 1994, 2).

Echoing the words of the late Ron Edmonds, Richard L. Green states, "The essential problem comes from the structure and attitudes of those in public education today who simply are not overly concerned as to whether or not minority kids learn" (Cited in Richardson, 1994, p. B7).

In a polity which increasingly rejects their participation and with a belief that the economy can provide opportunity for fewer persons, the separate special education system first disproportionately identifies minority and poor youth as "losers" and then inequitably in a separate special education system promotes their failure.

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